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NATIONAL HEALTH SURVEY UNDERWAY IN SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

The nation's most comprehensive study of the health and nutritional status of Americans gets underway in San Bernardino County beginning January 4.

Each year, approximately 7,000 randomly-selected residents in 15 counties across the country will have the opportunity to participate in the latest National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics.

"NHANES is very much like a 'health exam center on wheels,' that goes out into actual communities to get data on real Americans," said County Health Officer Eric Frykman. "It truly is a unique resource for health information in this country, and without it we wouldn't have data on a number of important health conditions."

Some of the past findings uncovered through NHANES include:

- From 1980 and 1994, the percent of adults with high serum cholesterol fell from 26 percent to 19 percent.
- Over the same period, the percent of adults with hypertension fell from 39 percent to 23 percent.

In addition, NHANES data was used by NCHS to create the standardized growth charts that pediatricians across the county currently use to track children's growth.

The information gathered in NHANES will be used by public health officials, legislators, and physicians to develop sound health policies, direct and design health programs and services, and expand the health knowledge for the nation.

In the past, NHANES data has been used as the basis for such successful public health programs as the lead abatement efforts.

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“Between 1980 and 1994, NHANES showed a 78 percent drop in the number of Americans who had levels of lead in their blood that were too high,” said CDC Director Dr. Julie L. Gerberding. “NHANES was able to tell us first that we had a problem, and then later tell us that our prevention strategies were working.”

Individuals are randomly selected for the survey and represent the U.S. population of all ages. Special emphasis this year will be on the health of adolescents, pregnant women, and older Americans. In addition to covering the health of the total population, profiles of the health of specific groups, e.g. African-Americans and Mexican-Americans are developed.

Respondents first participate in a health interview conducted in the respondent's home. The physical examinations that follow will take place in one of three mobile examination centers that will travel simultaneously to different communities, large and small, urban and rural, across the country for data collection. During the course of 2005, NHANES has visited areas such as Tacoma, WA and New York City.

Specially-trained professionals conduct the household interviews. A team of health professionals, including a physician, dentist, nutritionists, and health and laboratory technicians using high-tech, state-of-the-art equipment, staffs the mobile examination centers.

All participants will receive a focused examination by a physician, as well as a dietary interview, body measurement, and dental examination. There is also a fitness test, where many participants will walk on a treadmill while technicians assess their cardiovascular health. The various tests and procedures depend on the age of the participant.

No medical care is provided directly in the examination center, but medical and dental reports of findings are given to each participant if they wish.

All individual information collected in the survey is kept strictly confidential, and privacy is protected by public law.

Participants selected to undergo the physical examination receive reimbursement for travel expenses and up to \$100 per person.

Anyone who is randomly selected for this important health survey is urged to participate.

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